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ABSTRACT

The staff development model described in this paper involves collaborative planning in which the teachers are involved, while also providing a mechanism to assist participants to identify their inservice needs. The model consists of three major components: (1) the preliminary input of a selected committee which produces a needs assessment survey; (2) the distribution of the survey to all personnel; and (3) a summary of responses to the survey which makes it possible to construct a useful and relevant staff development plan. Personnel from the Institute for Educational Research, which is a non-profit consortium of 125 school districts in Illinois, work actively with the school personnel in all phases of the development of the inservice program. The model is individualized for each school setting and sensitive to the particular needs of each school district. (JD)

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...TEACHER TODAY:

IDENTIFYING STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

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...TEACHER TODAY:

IDENTIFYING STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

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The Institute for Educational Research (IER) is a non-profit consortium of 125 school districts which has provided consultative and research assistance to schools in Illinois and other states for more than 20 years. During that time, IER has created a model for identifying and meeting the staff development needs of member districts. While the individual district was the original focus, the model's generic approach has broad applicability in any similar endeavor aimed at obtaining meaningful input from diverse sources, and the model has been extended for use at the cross-district level as well.

Research Support for Model

When consultants or presenters are preparing to give an inservice program, they must answer the question, "Who is my client?" Generally, the impetus for an inservice program originates in the school administration or in a staff development committee, but the program itself is aimed at the teaching staff as a whole. It can be difficult to present an inservice program which is perceived as useful by teachers when all information about the topic comes only from district

administrators, or at most, from a very small number of their peers designated as the District Inservice Committee.

Recent research has found that the degree of interest in, commitment to, and enthusiasm for staff inservice was directly influenced by the form in which the project planning took place, and that this was true both for teachers and administrators. Successful inservice programs originate from within the participating unit, and are characterized by collaborative planning which has involved the teachers themselves (e.g., Joslin, 1974; Lawrence, 1974; Harrison, 1980).

However, most preservice programs do little to prepare prospective teachers to assume an effective inservice role; that is, teachers do not learn how to identify their needs or how to ask for more appropriate assistance (Cyphert, 1981). Thus, to be successful, any effort at identifying staff inservice needs must find a way to draw out the concerns and needs of the future participants.

The model to be described fulfills the criteria of collaboration with potential recipients for a useful and valid inservice program, while at the same time creating a mechanism to assist participants to identify their inservice needs.

Description of the Generic Needs Assessment Model

In the first step of the model, an IER research consultant makes a site visit in order to meet with school or district representatives, who generally are constituted as an official staff development committee. The IER staff guides the committee through the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) in order to explore the staff needs of the district. This process consists of the individual generation of as many ideas as possible by each participant, the presentation of these ideas to the group, discussion and clarification, and a vote on the relative importance of the clarified ideas. Thus, NGT includes both a brainstorming/creative phase and an analytic/evaluative phase. These two parts to the process ensure that participation is maximized from all group members in order to arrive at a truly collaborative list of the most important staff development topics, formats, times, locations.

The ideas produced at this meeting become the core of a questionnaire designed by IER staff. Based on considerable experience in designing usable and understandable survey instruments, IER staff groups the issues, states them in clear and parallel fashion, and designs response formats to ensure a high rate of return. The ideas, however, are wholly those of the district.

When the questionnaire is in draft form, an IER research consultant meets with the district staff development

committee to make any needed revisions. At this time, survey items are clarified further, any omitted areas are considered for inclusion, and the format is reviewed and edited to the satisfaction of the district committee. IER then prepares a final copy of the questionnaire for duplication at the district.

The questionnaires are distributed to all staff, thus assuring the fullest possible input. After surveying its professional staff, all completed questionnaires are returned to IER for analysis. IER staff designs a coding format for the survey, enters the data, analyzes both the responses to survey items and the written comments added by respondents, and prepares a summary report of the results. The analysis conducted by IER is designed to put the survey results into concise and usable form for the district, so that the committee can get on with the development of the inservice plan.

The report includes information regarding the extent to which the staff perceive a need for training in all of the areas included on the survey. In addition, a breakdown is also provided which indicates the way in which interest in each topic varies by level (elementary vs. secondary), by building, by teachers' years of experience, or by area of specialty (Social Studies vs. Science, or Core Academic vs. Special Area, for example). Similar information is provided

regarding the preferred format, time, and location of inservice. This kind of anaylsis makes it much more likely that future inservice participants will perceive the inservice as useful and relevant, since all were included in the planning phase.

As a final step in the planning, IER staff meet with the staff development committee to discuss the results of the needs assessment survey and to explore further implications for staff development. The staff development committee then prepares a plan based on the results of the survey, IER recommendations, and local goals and objectives.

The model thus consists of three major components:

(1) the preliminary input of the committee which produces a survey;

(2) the survey of all affected personnel; and

(3) a summary of responses to the survey which makes it possible to construct a useful and relevant staff development plan.

Relevance of Generic Model to Individual School Districts

The model is straightforward and flexible, allowing personalization to each district; no part of the content of the survey is "canned". Each district focuses on different concerns and has different sensitivities. While aspects of the format for eliciting responses to survey items may be

similar on many questionnaires, the content of each survey is as unique as the district. As a result, the district staff development plan which is based on this survey is tailored to that district's needs. The fact that the plan is specific to the district means that district staff feel ownership in the staff development plan, and are much more likely to participate in it. This model has been used by IER with a number of school districts during the past five years with uniformly positive results.

The patterns which have emerged from the responses of different districts to this survey have been similar to each other in certain areas and quite different in others. While some topics have emerged again and again, others have emphasized the uniqueness of each district, both in design of the topics/questions and in data results.

**(Suggest we use 3-4 needs assessments as examples here--block out name of district, make transparencies.)

The role of IER staff throughout is a consultative or guiding one, with all decision-making being the province solely of the school or district itself. Teachers are viewed as professionals whose full input is crucial to the success of any subsequent inservice. Thus, the overall purpose of the model is to assure that the needs of the district are fully and appropriately identified through the joint efforts of the district and IER personnel.

Adaptation of Model to Multi-District Settings

IER uses a similar model to meet the training needs of educational staff without regard to district boundaries. IER's Board of Trustees is made up of representatives of 18 member school districts. As one of their functions, the Board serves as a committee to determine more generalizaed inservice needs of teachers which cut across district boundaries.

Again, IER staff guides the committee through the NGT process to collect data concerning staff development topics. Committee members generate ideas individually, the ideas are presented to the group for clarification and discussion, and as a result of the clarification process, some ideas are combined. The committee then votes on the relative importance of the ideas. Because it is not feasible to survey all teachers in all member districts, the committee's NGT process is expanded to include a more thorough and complete decision-making phase, taking the place of the teacher survey, data compiling, and analysis.

The outcome is a list of topics to be addressed, chosen to be of current importance and concern to teachers. The importance of these topics is validated by the fact that they echo the topics which have been commonly identified by individual school districts in their own needs assessments. These topics

are then developed by IER staff, who research the current literature and produce a 30-40 page review paper. This information is then summarized in the form of a 6-page publication for K-12 teachers, ...teacher today. Each ...teacher today includes a short summary of the relevant literature, and a description of "best practice" for teachers, including numerous examples and activities developed for immediate classroom use. The approach is data-based but intensely practical, and the purpose is to provide a short and useful lesson on the topic, in a manner which can be immediately implemented. This publication is mailed to subscribers throughout the country.

Topics addressed during the past year, for example, have included time management, testing, thinking skills, listening skills, student responsibility for learning, and competition/cooperation in the classroom.

Summary

The IER model presented is one which is efficient, flexible, and highly effective in identifying inservice needs. It can be extended to larger-scale settings, and can incorporate methods of attitude survey beyond the paper-pencil. It is individualized for each setting, and ensures the outcome recommended by research, that inservice be planned in a collaborative manner. The different concerns and sensitivities of each district are addressed, and district

staff are more likely to feel committed to the plan which emerges. Its use has produced uniformly positive results at the district and cross-district levels.